

Harrison on Decision Making...

Decisions can be a very difficult process for anyone. Decision making for the mentally ill can be taxing.

At my psychiatrist appointment the other day I asked him, "am I insane or have I been insane?" It was a true concern of mine. I was not sure if I should just curl up in my bedroom and stay out of the world's way or not. For the past 10 years I have taken much more than I have ever contributed and that is not my core belief - so I must be insane if I live one way and believe another!

I am fortunate to have a very honest and candid psychiatrist, one who knows me well. He explained... "Now look. You are not insane nor have you ever been. We find with Bipolar people, that many range in an above average IQ bracket. You fall into that bracket. We also find in the Bipolar community that impulse creates a lot of problems. As you well know, you (being Bipolar) can be walking along and start getting bursts of energy and ideas. A parallel to this might be someone drinking alcohol and getting what they call 'liquid courage'. With a person that is Bipolar however, it can be more like an instant adrenaline rush. This energy and myriad of ideas start to build and escalate as your body's chemistry reaches manic levels. At that point the two components of Bipolar; intelligence and impulse collide. An idea meets ability. Where the problem occurs is responsibility. Steven Cover said it best in his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People", 'the space between response and ability is the most crucial point of effectiveness. It is that space that we have the option to weigh logic and reason in order to make an informed decision.'

My psychiatrist continue... "You see, your ability to do things is phenomenal but your illness can present the courage to act upon an idea without logic or reason. You were never insane, though your actions would present themselves that way."

I thought about this perspective over the next couple of days. I have always found it frustrating that I know I am capable of things, I know that I work at a pace many can not and I know that I comprehend a lot at once - learn fast, if you will. What I could never figure out is why I could not find any longevity in anything that I do.

As I pondered my conversation with my doctor, things started to make a little more sense, especially that space between response and ability. I have read "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" numerous times. However, when you are ego driven, like I have been many times in my life, my thought process

told me, "you can't get more effective than I!". When I am not chemically balanced the ideas coming to my awareness are similar to snowflakes in a snowstorm. You can try to catch them all, but they melt so fast you forget they existed! Very frustrating when you know you could build a snowman of monumental proportions from the material being provided. If you don't act upon the idea, it may be gone forever!

Coping Skill:

The developed coping skill that I use to isolate the problem of impulse is a simple but effective one. I bought myself a nice little 6 x 6 journal. You could say a portable freezer for all the snowflakes! As the ideas start coming, I simply write quickly write them down instead of acting in haste.

More times than not, I look at the journal see a great idea and sit down to figure out how I could bring that idea to fruition. Mind you, sometimes I see ideas that I wonder to myself, "where in the world did I come up with that?"

Being Bipolar, I don't have the luxury of logic and reason always kicking in between response and ability - so I have had to put something physical in the equation. It is not an automatic fix, but something you actually have to train yourself to do and it then becomes second nature.

Also, I think it is very important to look at the moment and say to yourself and God, "does this bring peace to my life?"

And always,... continuing your medication therapy allows you the opportunity to widen the window between response and ability!

- Harrison Remy